



## TEXTUAL NOTE

THE text below is an electronic version of a Puritan pamphlet, *The Arminian Nunnery* (London: Printed for Thomas Underhill, 1641), an attack upon the religious community founded by Nicholas Ferrar at Little Gidding; this version was prepared by William S. Peterson (wsp@wam.umd.edu) for his Web site *Little Gidding*<sup>1</sup> and was uploaded to that site in July 2000. Although the text itself is out of copyright, Professor Peterson claims the rights to the distinctive formatting of this Adobe Acrobat version.

The title-page carries the explanation that the pamphlet is “*Humbly recommended to the wise consideration of this present PARLIAMENT*” and is embellished by a woodcut of a nun.

This text is complete, and the spelling and punctuation of the original have been retained. (The ornaments have been added.)



# THE ARMINIAN NUNNERY: OR, A BRIEF DESCRIPTION and Relation of the late erected *Monastick* Place, called the ARMINIAN NUNNERY at little GIDDING in HUNTINGTON-SHIRE.

*The Foundation is by a Company of Farrars  
at GIDDING.*

THERE stands a faire HOUSE well scituated with a fine Grove and sweet Walks, Letticed and Gardined on both sides; their livelihood or Renew about 500 l. *per Annum*. One of my Lord Mountagues Mansion-Houses being within two or three miles off called *Hemmington House* not farre from *Oundle*.

A Gentleman comming to visit the said *House*, was first brought to faire spacious Parlour, where soone after appeared the old Gentlewomans second sonne, a Batchelour of a plain presence, but pregnant of speech and parts, unto whom when I had deprecated and excused my selfe for so sudden and bold a visit, he entertained me with seeming civilitie and humilitie.

After deprecations and some complements past betwixt us, he said I should see his Mother if I pleased, and I shewing my desire, hee went up into a Chamber, and presently returned

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1. <http://www.inform.umd.edu/ENGL/englfac/WPeterson/GIDDING/welcome.htm>

with his Mother, (a tall ancient Gentlewoman about 80. years of age) shee being Matron of the *House*, his elder Brother a Priest-like man in habit and haire. Now he had a Sister married in the House to one Mr. *Cooles*, who had 14. or 15. Children in the *House*, and of these with a man-servant and 2. or 3. maid-servants the *Family* then consisted.

I was permitted to salute the Mothers and Daughters, as we use to salute other women: and after we were all sitten Circular, I had leave to speak ingenuously of what I had heard and did or might conceive of their *House*. I first told him what I had heard of the *Nunns* at *Gidding*; of *two watching and praying all night*; of their *Canonicall houres*; of their *Crosses* on the outside and inside of the *Chapell*; of an *Altar* richly decked with *Tapestry*, *Plate* and *Tapers*; of their *Adorations*, *genuflections*, and *geniculations*, which I told them plainly might strongly savour of Superstition and Popery.

Now you must understand that the younger Brother who first came to me is a jolly pragmaticall and Priest-like fellow, and is the mouth for all the rest, and he began to cut me off, and answered with a serious protestation (though not so properly) that he did as verily beleieve the Pope to be *Antichrist*, as any Article of his Faith, which I noted and gave the hearing; and therein if he spake from his heart, he much differed from the opinions of Priest *Shelford*, Priest *Squire*, Dr. *Draffig*, the red Dragon of *Arminians*, and other eminent *Arminians*.

He denied the place to be a *Nunnery*, and that none of his Nieces were *Nunnes*: but hee confessed that two of his *Nieces* had lived the one thirtie, the other thirty and two yeares Virgins, and so resolved to continue (as he hoped they would) to give themselves to *Fasting* and *Prayers*; but had made no *Vowes*.

For their *Cononicall hours*, he said they usually prayed 6. times a day, *viz.* 2. times a day publikly in the *Chappel*, and 4 times a day more privatly in the *House*, in the *Chappel* after the Order of the Booke of Common Prayer, at both times chanting out aloud the *Letany*; and in their *House* particular private Prayers for a *Familie*.

And hee being asked, if they spent so much time in *Praying*, they would leave little for *Preaching*, or for their weekly calling for which the Text is pregnant: *He that turneth away his eares, from hearing the Law, his Prayer is abominable*: PRO. 18 and 19. And the fourth Commandement, *Six dayes shalt thou labour, &c.* Unto which this Priest-like pregnant Prolocutor answered but flubbringly, That sometimes a neighbour *Parson* would come and preach in their Chappell; and to the other, That their *Calling* (forsooth) was to *serve* GOD, which he took to be best: Oh the stupid and blind devotion of these people, for Men and Women in health of able and active bodies and parts to have no particular *Callings*, or to quit their *Callings*, and betake themselves to I wot not what new forme of *Fasting* and *Prayer*, and a contemplative idle life, a lip-labour devotion, and a will-worship, *Eccl.* 4. & 17. which by the word of God is no better than a specious kind of idlenesse, as *St. Augustine* termes them to be but *splendida peccata*: as if diligence in our particular lawfull callings were no part of our service to God.

And doubtlesse such a Monastic Innovation in a settled Church-government, is of dangerous consequence in many respects.

For their *night-watching* and *rising at 4. of the Clock in the morning* (which was much for the Matron of 80. years of age, and for her Grand-children) the Priest-like Prolocutor did not want a premeditated excusive justification: But how neere it complieth with the superstitious *Nunneries* in Popish places beyond the Seas, I and others that have travelled and seene them may plainly perceive and notifie; especially considering hee could not but confesse there were every night two (*alternatim*) continued in their Devotions untill the rest rose.

For their diverse *Crosses*, the Prolocuter made me this answer; That they were not ashamed of the badge of Christian profession, which the first Propugnators of Faith bore in their Banners, and which are in our *Church Discipline* retained unto this day.

How confused and absurd this Crosse Answer was, let every Christian man judge.

On the Chimney-piece where wee sate, there was a Manuscript Tableture with this Inscription following, whereof I desired, and had a Coppy transcribed.

+  
IHS

Hee that by reprove of our errors or remembrance of that which is more perfect seekes to make us better is welcome and an Angel of God.



And



Hee that by a cheerefull participation of that which is good confirms us in the same, is welcome as a Christian Friend.

But

He that any way goes about to divert or disturb us in that which is and ought to bee amongst Christians though it be not usuall with the World, is a burthen whiles he stayes and shall beare his judgement whosoever he be.



And



Hee that faults us in absence for that which in presence hee made shew to approve of, doth by a double guilt of flattery and slander violate the bonds both of Friendship and Christianity.

MARY FERRAR *Widdow, Mother and Matron of this Familie; aged about 80. years, that bids adue to all feares and hopes of this world, and desires to serve God.*

The Letters of the top of which Inscription are the proper Character of the Jesuites in every *Booke* and *Exhibite* of theirs. And the lines of the Inscription, how full of nonsense, justification and ostentation of superstitious devotion, besides their Creation of *Angels of GOD*; Let every understanding Christian Reader or hearer hereof judge.

The Prolocutor in justification of the Jesuiticall *forme* of Letters which I excepted against: he said it was the auspicious name worthy to be the *Alpha* and *Omega* of all our

Actions, and wee are commanded *to write such things upon the posts of our Houses, and upon our Gates*: Whereas indeed the Text which he aimed at is in the Old Testament and not in the New, where there is no mention of *Jesus* but *Jehovah*: And the words are most plainly, *Moses* Precept of the Law of God, and not of the Name, &c. *Deut. 6. &c.*

Therefore this his Apologeticall answere was nothing but ignorant Eloquence, or eloquent ignorance; most grossly and absurdly applied.

This Prolocutor confessed himself to bee about 42. yeares old, was a fellow in a House in *Cambridge* (he named not what *House*) and that he had taken Orders of a Deacon (but he said nothing of his having beene at *Rome*, as it is well knowne he hath been.)

Now I was invited by this Deacon to goe with him into the Chappell to their devotion, at the entrance whereof this Priestlike deft Deacon made a low obeysance, a few paces farther lower, and comming to the halfe-pace which is at the East end where the *altered Table* stood, hee bowed and prostrated himselfe to the ground; then he went up into a faire large reading place (having placed mee above with a faire large Window Cushion of green Velvet before me.) The *Mother Matron* with all her *Traine*, which were her *Daughters* and *Daughters Daughters*, who with foure *Sonnes* kneeled all the while on the bodie of the half pace, all being in black gownes, and as they came to Church in round Monmouth Cappes, all I say in blacke, save one of the *Daughters* who was in a Friers grey gowne.

We being all placed before the Deacon (for now so we must call him) with a very loud and shrill voyce began and trolled out the Letanie, and read divers other Prayers and Collects in the Book of *Common Prayer* and *Athanasius* his Creed; and concluded with the forme of words, of, *The peace of God, &c.*

Their Service ended, the *Mother* with all her Company attending my comming downe; but I durst not come very neere lest I might happily have light upon one of the Virgins lippes, not knowing whether they would have taken a second kisse in good part or no, with their civill salutations towards mee, which I returned them a far off, they departed from the Chappell home.

Now the Deacon and I left, I observed the Chappell in generall to bee fairely and speciously adorned with herbes and flowers naturall and artificiall, and upon every pillar along on both sides the Chappell (such as are in Cathedrall Churches) *Tapers*; I meane, great Vigin-waxe-Candles on every Pillar: The *halfe-pace* at the upper end (for there was no other division betwixt the body of the Chappell and the East end) was all covered with Tapestry and upon that half-pace stood the *Altar-like Table*, with a rich Carpet hanging very large on the halfe-pace, and some Plate, as a Challice, and Candlesticks with waxe-Candles in them: By the preaching-place stood the Font, a leg-laver and cover all of Brasse cut and carved with Imagery worke, the Laver of the bignes of a Barbers Bason, and the Cover had a Crosse erected on it. And this is all I had leisure to observe in the Chappell.

Then I made bold in temperate termes to aske the Deacon what use they made of so many *Taper* on the Table, and in the Chappell, he answered (forsooth) to give them light, when they could not see without them. And having formerly as I said before obtained leave to say what I listed, I asked him to

whom he made al these Courtsies, bowings and prostrations, he said to GOD; I told him the Papists make no other answer for their bowing to Images and Crucifixes, yet we account them Idolators for so doing, as justly wee may: He said wee have no such warrant for the one; but for the other we had a precept (forsooth) *to doe all things with decencie and order*, as he tooke this to be. I demanded then why hee used not the same solemnitie in his house, and whether he thought the Chappell more holy than his *House*, he said no, but that God was more immediately present in the *Chappell* then in the *House*, whilst we were worshipping him, I replied that God was as present at *Paules Crosse*, as in *Paules Church*, at the Preaching-place at *White hall* and the *Spittle Sermons*, as in other Churches and Chappels. For *wheresoever two or three, &c.* and in those fore-named places, no not in the bodie of any Churches, though there be Sermons and Prayers there, we do not use this threefold reverence, or bowing, or prostrating, no nor the Papists themselves, unlesse in the Chancell towards the East, wherein an Altar or some Crucifix is; He answered me somewhat confusedly, for this is their *trinary number* of bowing which I did not well understand, nor well conceive what he meant.

It seemes moreover that at their monthly receiving the Sacrament (which this defendant Deacon performeth and consecrateth the *bread* and *wine*) their servants when they received, were attended by their Master and Mistris, and not suffered to lay or take away their owne trenchers as it is reported.

They also take upon them to be Phisitians and Chiurgions in ministring Physicke and Chiurgery for the sicke and sore, and pretend to be very charitable to the poore, but as it is verily thought in a meritorious way.

They also take upon them to be Catechisers and to task many poore people with Catechisticall questions; Which when they come and can make answer thereunto, they are rewarded with money and their dinners, and so they pretend they feed the poores bodies and soules, But their Catechisme or Catechisticall questions (some say) are strange ones and far different from our Orthodox Catechismes. You may take notice that since the observation of the premises, th'old Martron the place is dead.

And now beloved and Christian Reader, you have had an ingenuous Relation of this late erected *religious House* for the service of God (as the Founders would have it termed and held.) But certes we may wonder at nothing more that in a settled Church-government our Bishops who are accounted *Governours of the Church* will permit any such erection or Foundation, so neerly complying with *Popery*, and that by a fond and fanaticall *Family of Farrars*, the principall Preist a *poly-pragmaticall* Fellow, having been at *Rome*, and there (as it is credibly reported) he was conformable to all the abominable *Ceremonies* and *Services* of the *Church of Rome*. Now forsooth, in outward shew, hee would pretend that hee and the rest disclaime the *Pope* and *Poperie*, but by and by you shall see him and his Companions crouching, cringing, and prostrating to the ground to the Altar-like poore *Communion-Table*, or the rich gilded candlesticks, and waxe Tapers and other knacks thereone standing; And for another shew that they would not bee accounted Popish, they have gotten the *Booke of Martyrs* in the *Chapell*; but few or none are suffered to read therein, but onely it is there (I say) kept for a shew; and be-

sides their lip-labour of trolling out the *Letanie* foure times a day, they have promiscuous private Prayers all the night long by nightly turnes, just like as the English *Nunnes* at Saint *Omers* and other Popish places: which private Prayers are (as it seems) taken out of of *John Cozens* his *Cozening Devotions*, (as they are rightly discovered to be by Orthodox men) and extracted out of divers Popish *Prayer-Bookes*. This *Fryer like Familie*, and as they are not unfitly termed *Arminian Nunnery* have divers other Commick and Mimmick actions of will-worship to the great dishonour of Almighty God, who will be served *in spirit and truth*: and he will once say unto them as hee did by the Prophet *Isaiah*, to the superstitious and ceremonious *Jewes*, *Who hath required this at your hands? &c.*

Surely we may marvell that the present *Primate of all England and Metropolitane* being the principall *Governour* of the *Church*, under his sacred *Majestie*, and as he professeth such an *Anti-Papist* and enemy to *Superstition* and *Idolatry*, should permit this *Innovation*, and connive at such *canting* betwixt the barke and the tree in matter of *Religion*: But by what hath been related of these Peoples practises, we see that position made good, That *Arminianisme* is a bridge to *Poperie*, the bridge was not onely made (a great part of the Clergie of this Land being downright *Arminians*) but some have past over it; witnesse Preist *Shelford*, Preist *Cozens*, and this Familie in this Booke treated on with divers others, and had not God of his great mercy undermin'd the chiefe Arches of that bridge, causing them to fall in the River of confusion, wee have cause to think that the greater part of the Land would also have followed the rest; but now God hath hindred it, not only by breaking the bridge in the just downfall of many of the chiefe of the *Arminian Faction*, but also by setting up that strong, high, and thick wall of the late Parliamentary national Protestation; for which (as also for all his mercies at all times, especially for this years wonders) his name be for ever praised (say I) and let all Protestants say, *Amen*.

FINIS.

